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SUBJECT: NATIONAL ASSEMBLY WRAP-UP: MARCH 29 TO APRIL 1, 2003

1. SUMMARY: The National Assembly voiced strong support for Operation Iraqi Freedom, approved the GOK's supplemental budget request of approximately \$1.6 billion, and debated punishing hostile states by withholding loans from the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development. The mood of defiance prompted Shaykh Sabah al-Ahmed to remind MPs that Kuwait is and will remain an Arab country. END SUMMARY.

2. The National Assembly session on March 31 opened with formal expressions of support for the U.S. led military action in Iraq and a storm of criticism against those Arab nations which have not condemned ongoing Iraqi missile strikes against Kuwait. (NOTE: The Kuwaiti argument is that the coalition's first attacks were carried out by cruise missiles launched from platforms outside Kuwait, and that Iraq struck first against Kuwait; accordingly, Kuwait considers the Iraqi surface-to-surface missile strikes to be acts of aggression. They also argue that the attacks seem aimed at civilian rather than military targets. END NOTE.) Poloff and PolFSN attended the March 31 session; MPs showered them both with expressions of support for the war and for the US role in it.

3. Moving into closed-door session, the National Assembly then voted 39 to 4 (with 9 abstentions) to pass the KD500 million (approx \$1.6 billion) supplemental budget requested by the government. The supplement will meet the cost of emergency security needs resulting from the current situation in the region. The Ministry of Defense will receive KD200 million, the Ministry of the Interior KD121 million, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs KD30 million, the Ministry of Information KD12 million, the National Guard KD5 million, and various other government departments will share the remaining KD129 million.

4. As a result of the mob attack on the Kuwaiti Embassy in Tripoli, the GOK expelled the Libyan ambassador to Kuwait. MP Marzouk Al-Hbaini praised the government's action as a step in the right direction, but stated "we still look forward to closing the embassy as this will be a message to all that he who does not respect Kuwait and its sovereignty will not be respected by the Kuwaiti people."

5. Deputy Speaker Meshari Al-Anjari and a number of other MPs introduced a draft bill to suspend for two years all aid and loans extended by the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development (KFAED). The MPs want to consider existing and future aid requests in light of recent developments in both the Arab and broader international arenas in order to most effectively achieve the political and strategic goals of the state. Al-Anjari expressed his belief the amendment would enable the government to reconsider its loan policy pursuant to Kuwait's higher interests. The intent was unmistakable: punish those states that have benefitted from Kuwaiti aid but now castigate Kuwait for its role in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

6. The National Assembly called on the Financial and Economic Affairs Committee to submit its report on the above amendment by April 9 so that the bill can be debated during the April 14 session. The National Assembly also agreed to prioritize draft bills on the redistribution of electoral constituencies and on amendments to the children's allowance; both will be debated before mid-April.

7. COMMENT: As Kuwaitis realize how isolated they are in the Arab world, they are growing more defiant. So much so that First Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Shaykh Sabah al-Ahmed sought to calm MPs, reminding the National Assembly that Kuwait is and will remain an Arab country.

JONES